

CONSERVATION NOTE 5

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BIRD BANDING

The Hows and Whys

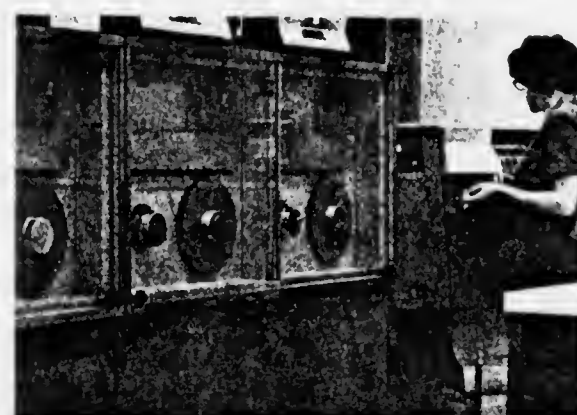
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
Fish and Wildlife Service



This building houses the Bird Banding Laboratory.

Three pintail ducks from North America turned up in widely separated parts of the world. One duck was taken near Cali, Colombia, South America; one in Japan; and the third along the Dart River in England. The South American hunter was told that his duck had come from North Dakota. The Japanese scientists learned their bird had been on a National Wildlife Refuge in New Mexico. The English sportsman found that his pintail, just 21 days before, had been seen in Labrador, some 2,200 miles across the Atlantic. How did these people know their ducks had come from North America?

It really isn't such a mystery as it might seem. On the leg of each duck the hunter had found an aluminum band. The band carried a number and a request that the finder of the band report to the Bird Banding Laboratory, Washington, D.C. Each hunter did exactly that. Records of the wild birds banded in North America are kept in this office. Here it is that the band number and species, age and sex, date of banding, place of banding and name of the bander are recorded. When someone sends in a band he has found, the record can be located quickly, because all this information is stored in a computer.



Banding information is recorded on magnetic tape. The computer can locate records quickly.

Now let's come back to the three banded ducks. Clerks, with the aid of the computer, soon found the three numbers among the 23 million banding records on file in the office. Then they sent each reporter a Certificate of Appreciation telling him the kind of bird he had taken, whether male or female, how old it was, where it had been banded and by whom. Since the banders were also interested in knowing what happened to their pintails, they were told who recovered them, how, when and where they were found, and whether the bird was dead or alive.

History of bird banding

The marking of birds was carried on during the days of the Roman Empire to identify the falcons of the emperor. Modern bird banding really had its beginning with Hans Christian Mortensen, a school-teacher of Viborg, Denmark. In 1890 he began putting metal bands on the legs of teal, pintails, storks, starlings, and two or three kinds of hawks. These bands had his name and address inscribed on them. As his banded birds began to appear in many places in Europe, other bird students became interested in bird "ringing," as it is called in Europe. In a short time bird banding was "catching on" in America, and more and more people began to band birds in the United States. Deciding they could accomplish more if they worked as a group, in 1909 they formed the American Bird Banding Association. During World War I, however, banding lagged. Biologists in the Bureau of

Wildlife workers banding a Canada goose.



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